



# SPRING 2012 NEWSLETTER

Hello Four Rivers Association Members,

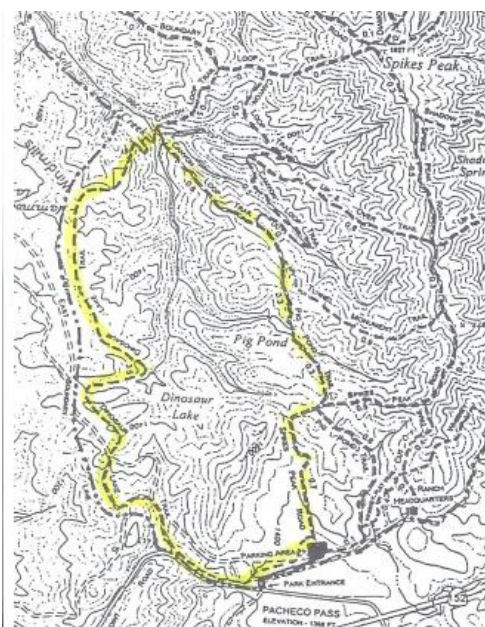
Another new year has arrived and with it new opportunities to enjoy our local nature areas. As it begins to warm up the wildflowers will begin to bloom and many birds will begin their yearly migrations. Our local nature continues to do what it had done for millennia so get out your boots, binoculars, cameras, and walking sticks and visit our parks.

--David Milam, editor

## Dinosaur Lake Trail

- third in the series

Dinosaur Lake Trail leaves the south side of the main parking lot via the left gate beside the information kiosk along the south side of the picnic area. After you pass through the gate the trail immediately



veers to the left and heads southeast through this large, grazed field. Every spring you can see large splotches of goldfields coloring the hills surrounding this field. You will see big purple patches of Purple Owl's Clover, pink Checker Bloom flowers, pretty yellow and white Butter-and-Eggs, and bright yellow California Buttercups all along the flat portion of the field. You will find that there are 2-3 parallel trails with-in this field and you can follow any of them to the small green gate in the fence line just east of the park's main entrance.

After passing through the green gate the trail heads east and the habitat changes quickly. While the field was open, the trail now begins a section where it is mostly on the north side of the wooded hillside, leading to a quick change in flora. All of the flowers which had been so plentiful in the field are now absent but are replaced by others that prefer the northern exposure with its increased shade. Coast Live Oaks and Blue Oaks are plentiful along with a variety of shrubs including some vigorous Poison Oak plants. I recommend that you know what Poison Oak looks like and just be careful what you touch or step on and you should be able to stay away from the Poison Oak.



Poison Oak – remember the saying “Leaves of three, leave it be.” New leaves in springtime are red and they turn red again in fall. Even the bare branches have the oils that can cause the rash.



Some of the other plants you will see along this portion of the trail are Miner's Lettuce, Chinese Houses, Blue Fiesta Flowers, Shooting Stars, Woodland Stars, Blue Dicks, Grass Nut, Wavy-leaf Soap Plant, Thistles, California Saxifrage, California Poppies, and Wild Cucumber. This section of the trail is another great place to



do some bird watching but it is sometimes hard to find the birds within the dense shrubbery.

You can usually find some hummingbirds flitting around fairly close to the trail.

After a bit the trail rounds the eastern edge of the hillside and everything changes again. Being out of the north side and instead being on the sunnier east side of the hill causes another rapid change in plants. Here you will



see California Sagebrush, Sticky Monkey Flower, Blue Elderberries, Hillside Gooseberries, and Toyon shrubs. Along the first portion of this sunnier section you can find the toxic Death Camas with their pretty white flowers.



Also found are a few species of lacy-leaved Lomatium.

As the trail continues through the shrubbery you can sometimes catch a glimpse of Brush Rabbits, Western Fence Lizards or long, silvery California Whiptail Lizards.



The trail eventually joins Windmill Road. A few feet along the road and overlooking the canyon to the east you will find a post marked “5”. You may have noticed posts 1-4 earlier on the hike. These are part of the Self-Guided Springtime Hike that the park has developed. Stop 5, where you are now, is a place that you can see all of the roads ever built over Pacheco Pass. Far off to the left you can see Hwy 152. Closer to the left you will see Dinosaur Point Road, which was Hwy 152 before the San Luis Reservoir was built. If you look across the canyon you can see the remains of the old 1920's era highway that crossed Pacheco Pass (and which you may have noticed yourself walking upon its paved surface earlier in your hike). Finally, if you look below you in the canyon you can see some of the remaining parts of Andrew Firebaugh's improved dirt toll road he built



over the pass in 1857 and which was used by the Butterfield Stage Line from 1858-1861. This is another place where you can often get a good look at birds in the oak trees below you.

The trail continues on the road for few hundred yards until, at post 7 (by a large Gooseberry bush); it turns left off of Windmill Road and onto an old unused dirt ranch road. Here it heads up the hill. As you come to the top of the hill you will be rewarded with some awesome views of San Luis Reservoir and the San Joaquin Valley.



This oak savannah has numerous dark blue Larkspurs, bright orange California Poppies, vibrant yellow California Violets, blue Miniature Lupines, Blue Dicks and magenta and white Shooting Stars scattered throughout the grasslands. You can also find clumps of the California State Grass, the perennial Purple Needlegrass. The oak savannah is also a great place to see Red-tailed Hawks, White-tailed Kites, Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, Turkey Vultures and Golden Eagles soaring overhead while in the Blue Oaks you can find Oak Titmouse, Yellow-billed Magpie, Acorn Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Black Phoebe, Western Kingbirds, Steller's Jays, Western Scrub-Jays, Western Bluebirds, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, many different Sparrows and Finches, White-Breasted and Red-Breasted Nuthatches, Phainopepla, and many others. Remember, Pacheco State Park has over 100 species of birds identified within its boundaries. Sometimes, if you are lucky, you can spot a Coyote, Bobcat, Black-tailed Deer or some of the numerous Tule Elk which make the park their home. The Elk mostly stay in the area of the park east of Dinosaur Lake Trail, but do sometimes travel to the western side of the park. You can also get a good view of some of the



167 Wind Turbines that operate within and help fund the park. The largest turbine was installed in 2002 and has blades each over 80 feet long! This turbine alone produces over 900 KW.



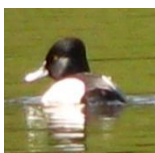
This wind turbine farm was first developed and had a lease before

the park inherited the property in 1992.

Continuing up the trail you come to Windmill Road again. At this point the Self-Guided Springtime Hike turns right and goes back along the road. But Dinosaur Lake Trail continues straight across the road. After a short, relatively flat hike the trail turns down a canyon and proceeds to the lovely Dinosaur Lake. Dinosaur Lake, actually a man-made stock pond, has been in place for a long time—I have found it on old 1930's era maps. It was in place long before Dinosaur Point was designated along the San Luis



Reservoir shoreline. And NO, from everything I know dinosaur fossils were never found around here. My



theory is that if you look at a map of Dinosaur Lake it resembles a three-toed dinosaur footprint, hence the name. You can often see Red-winged Blackbirds in the tules along the shoreline. Lesser Scaup, American Coots, Buffleheads and other waterfowl are often seen paddling around the lake. After a very short walk along the lake's shoreline the trail heads back up the hillside and out upon the "flat" area of the park.

For the next mile or so it wanders due south among the oaks. You will get some fairly good, closer views of the older wind turbines, and a glimpse of another of the park's ponds, Mammoth Lake. This "flat" section of trail is fairly easy, in fact I would say that the except for the short jaunt down to Dinosaur Lake and back up to the top, the whole trail would be rated as easy until the last quarter mile or so when it descends down into Salt Creek. This last section is a series of switchbacks and I have always had a great bird watching experience there. With the oaks above, beside and below you it is great observatory.



In the spring months the creek carries water and has quite a few small pools in which you can sometimes see breeding California Newts or maybe a protected, threatened California Red-Legged Frog. The Salt Creek junction is 3.5 miles from the parking lot via Dinosaur Lake Trail. From here it the shortest way back-about 2 miles-is to turn right and head north on Canyon Loop Trail-Pig Pond Trail-Spikes Peak Trail. Or if you want to really challenge yourself you can proceed west up the hill on Canyon Loop to South Boundary Loop and on up to Spikes Peak Trail, then follow it back to the parking lot.



Completing the hike will leave you tired, but hopefully with some wonderful experiences and memories.

As always be sure to take 1-2 quarts of drinking water, more if it is hot, since none is available on any of the trails in the park. It is also advisable to wear a hat and use sunscreen for protection. Cell phones may work in some areas of the park, but will not work in much of the park. During the winter and spring months, cattle grazing takes place within the park. If you find a gate open please leave it open, if you find a gate closed please close it again after passing through. There are some electrified fencing during the grazing period. **DO NOT TOUCH THE SINGLE WIRE ELECTRICAL FENCING!** And finally, before you head out down the trails, don't forget to grab a free trail map available at the information kiosk by the self-registration area in the parking lot.

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## Things to do this spring:

1. Go visit a park near you and enjoy the springtime renewal that nature provides every year. There are some great trails in our parks and nature areas. Wildflowers begin blooming in mid-February and the wonderful show continues through May. Although there are not the great showy masses of flowers in our dry summer and fall months there are still many flowers that can be found. The waterfowl begin their migration back north soon so get out there and enjoy them while you can. Many songbirds are just beginning to head back north from their winter grounds in Central and South America while others head north from our area to spend the summer in Canada and Alaska. So get out your binoculars and do some birding—parks are great places to see them.
2. You can help your local songbirds around your home by installing a bird bath, planting flowers that provide them food, or installing a bird feeding area. There are many good books that can help you plan



your own bird garden. I have counted 45 different species of birds that have visited my back yard in the past four years.

3. Volunteer to help at an event at your local park. Would you be interested in assisting the hike leader on the Path of the Padres Hikes or one of the Wildflower Hikes at Pacheco State Park? How about assisting with restoration/revegetation projects? It can be an amazing feeling when you revisit a park a few years later and realize that you planted many of the surrounding trees, shrubs and grasses. Do you like meeting people, answering their questions, giving out information, selling publications? These are just some of the things you could do at the park's special events. If any of these seem like something you might be interested in doing please call 209-826-1197 to sign up.
4. Camping, hiking, fishing, picnicking, and boating. Your local parks are here for you to enjoy. Please come on out.

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Long-time FRA Director and former FRA President Eva Mae McClelland decided to step down. Her tireless work for the FRA will be greatly missed, as will her sharp wit. Eva was a guide at the Romero Visitor's Center at San Luis Reservoir for many years. She was instrumental in getting the annual Kid's Fishing and Fun Day started and put in many hours every year to make sure it was a great event for all the kids. We wish Eva well in her future years.

We would like to introduce Darryl Henley as our newest FRA Director. Darryl was in the first groups of volunteer trainees for the Path of the Padres Hikes in 1988. He was elected as a Director to the Four Rivers (Natural History) Association in 1990. He resigned after serving many years when he decided that his work commute did not allow him enough time to fulfill his Director duties. He now works in Los Banos so that will not be an issue. He is a strong supporter of State Parks and is a welcome addition to our board.

## Upcoming Springtime Events:

**Path of the Padres Hikes:** These popular hikes will be on some Fridays and most Saturdays and Sundays beginning March 3rd and will continue through April 29th. The hike begins at the Los Banos Creek Reservoir boat launch ramp at 8 am and returns to the ramp about 3:30 pm. A pontoon boat carries passengers for about 30-40 minutes to the west end of the reservoir. The group leaves the boat at the west end of the reservoir for a five mile round-trip hike. The hike is moderately strenuous and will take about 5 hours. Participants must be in good physical condition. Sturdy footwear and layered clothing are a must. Footwear may get wet if the creek is crossed. A good hat and sunscreen are recommended. Hikers should carry a lunch and a minimum of 2 quarts of water (more if a hot day). Throughout the hike the natural and historic features of the area are pointed out and discussed by the hike leader. The hikes require reservations which can be made by calling 209-826-1197 Monday through Wednesday from 9 am until 4 pm. A reservation fee of \$12.00 per person over 12 years old and \$7.00 per child age 6-12 is required to confirm the telephone reservations. A family of 5 may reserve space for 2 adults and 3 children for \$30.00. Space is limited. On the day of the hike visitors must pay the State Park day-use parking fee of \$10.00 per car upon entry. (as a note, I went on the first POP hike this season, March 3, and we all had a great time. We

saw 23 different species of birds and two deer. The wildflowers were just beginning to bloom.)

**Pacheco State Park Wildflower Day:** This fun annual one day event will be March 31st from 9:30 am until 1:30 pm. A guided birdwatchers hike begins at 9:30 am. At 10 am there will be a naturalist led 2 mile hike that will be discussing the numerous wildflowers seen during the hike as well as historical information of the area. There will also be information tables set up by California State Parks, Four Rivers Association, Audubon Society, Department of Water Resources, as well as other fun, kid friendly activities. A day-use parking fee of \$5.00 per car is required upon entry. Call 209-826-1197 Monday through Friday from 9 am until 4 pm for further information.

**Pacheco State Park Nature Hikes:** During this 2 mile trail loop hike participants will learn about many of our native plants. The hikes will be naturalist led and take place from 10 am to 12 noon on Weekends from April 1 until April 29, except Easter Sunday, April 8<sup>th</sup>. Just show up at the Pacheco State Park parking area, pay the parking fee and be ready to have an enjoyable morning hike. At the end of the hike you can choose to have a picnic lunch at the park's shaded tables. A day-use parking fee of \$5.00 per car is required upon entry. Call 209-826-1197 Monday through Friday from 9 am until 4 pm for further information.

FRA Director David Milam will be guiding longer hikes on Saturdays in April. These hikes will follow the trails written about in our last three newsletters. They will be moderately strenuous to strenuous, would begin at 9 am and last from 4 to 7 hours. Participants must be in good physical condition. Sturdy footwear and layered clothing are a must. A good hat and sunscreen are recommended. Hikers should carry a lunch and a minimum of 2 quarts of water (more if a hot day). Just show up at the Pacheco State Park parking area, pay the parking fee and be ready to have an enjoyable morning hike. A day-use parking fee of \$5.00 per car is required upon entry. Please call 826-1197 Monday through Friday from 9 am until 4 pm for further information.

**Pacheco State Park Family Kite Day:** This annual family friendly day will be on Saturday, June 16<sup>th</sup> this year. Bring your own kites to fly or make or purchase a kite at the event. There will also be information tables set up by different groups, face painting, a kite hospital for any "injured" kites, a bubble-blowing contest, a pie-eating contest, and a hot dog stand may be available to purchase a quick lunch. A day-use parking fee of \$5.00 per car is required upon entry. Call 209-826-1197 Monday through Friday from 9 am until 4 pm for further information.

**San Luis Reservoir Kid's Fishing and Fun Day:** Mark Saturday May 19<sup>th</sup> on your calendars for this fun day. The event runs from 8 am until noon at San Luis Creek North Beach Area on the O'Neill Forebay and is open for kids up to 16 years old. Other fun activities taking place during the event have been free boat rides around the Forebay (weather permitting) and an electronic "fish catching" experience. A day-use parking fee of \$10.00 per

car is required upon entry. For further information call 209-827-5353 from 9 am until 4 pm.

## **Arena Plains Vernal Pools, Wildflowers, and Wildlife Annual Tour:**

The biologist led springtime tour begins at 9 am and last approximately 2-3 hours, consisting of caravanning in attendees' personal vehicles into the interior of the US Fish and Wildlife's Arena Plains Unit and walking out to the vernal pools on firm, but slightly uneven terrain. The tour is a mixture of driving and walking to look at the vernal pools and fabulous displays of wildflowers; however, participants who do not wish to walk can remain in their vehicles and participate only in the



driving portions.

Participants should wear sturdy footwear such as hiking boots.

Directions: the meeting place will be on the south side of Hwy 140

approximately 6.5 miles

east of Hwy 165 and 7 miles west of Applegate Road. The meeting location does not have a street address—it is a small sandy road with a sign marked "Snobird Lane". Turn south onto the sandy road and continue for a couple hundred yards to the meeting place at the refuge gate. Please note to be on the lookout for the "Snobird Lane" sign as it is a very small side road and could be easily missed. Please call 209-826-3508 for further information on the exact date and time (To Be Determined). The tour is free but you must be on time or you will find the entry gate locked and everybody gone on the tour!



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## **Recent Director's meeting items:**

**Election of two Directors:** John Fulton was re-elected for another term. Darryl Henley was elected also.

**Election of officers for 2012:** Madeline Yancey-President, John Fulton-Vice President, David Batcho-Treasurer, David Milam-Secretary.

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Your Newsletter editor, David Milam